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# *Introduction*

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## **Neighborhood Study Process**

During the 1980s, the City of Cambridge (along with the surrounding region), witnessed a wave of commercial growth and economic development. This growth expanded the City's tax base and created new jobs and opportunities for residents. While many residents welcomed this prosperity, it also brought about an increasing awareness of issues that are of concern to neighborhood residents: increased building density, traffic congestion and parking problems, the rising cost of housing, inadequate open space, and the threat to neighborhood character and quality of life.

Since 1988, the Community Development Department (CDD), through its neighborhood planning program, has conducted comprehensive studies in ten of the city's neighborhoods. The purpose of the neighborhood studies is to identify major planning opportunities through a joint effort between CDD and a citizen committee appointed by the City Manager. Through this collaborative effort, the goal is to analyze the present situation in the neighborhood and make recommendations for a course of action. Recommendations address such issues as traffic and parking, housing affordability and homeownership, neighborhood commercial areas and employment, park maintenance, and rezoning for areas that are inappropriately zoned. As part of each neighborhood study, CDD collects data on demographic changes since 1980, as well as changes in housing markets, land use, and development potential in each neighborhood.

For each study, the City Manager appoints a committee of neighborhood residents, small business owners, institutional representatives, and civic leaders, as well as staff from CDD, to review the data, identify problems that exist in the neighborhood, and make recommendations as to how to resolve these problems. The recommendations are presented to the City Council and, where appropriate, are incorporated into the work programs of City departments for implementation; in some cases, this implementation takes place over a short period of time, in others it is part of longer-term planning.

## **Agassiz Neighborhood Study**

The Agassiz Neighborhood Study Committee met between April of 2000 and December 2001. The Committee was composed of 8 appointed neighborhood residents, as well as one representative of Harvard University and one representative of Lesley University who attended meetings. During that time, the Study Committee heard presentations from city staff, discussed issues, and held public forums. Topics considered included housing, land use and zoning, urban design, transportation, open space, institutional uses and economic development. Through this process of learning, discussing, gathering feedback from the community, and working toward consensus, the committee developed recommendations to better the neighborhood.

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### **Growth Policy Document**

The neighborhood study process is an extension of the City's growth policy document, "Towards a Sustainable Cambridge," which outlines the City's planning assumptions and policies in the areas of land use, housing, transportation, economic development, open space, and urban design. CDD staff drafted this document in 1992 and 1993 after a series of workshops with citizen, business, and institutional representatives. It recognizes that Cambridge's diversity of land uses, densities, and population groups should be retained and strengthened. The document also calls for careful development of the city's evolving industrial districts, such as Alewife and lower Cambridgeport.

While the Growth Policy Document is comprehensive, it does not prescribe land uses or designs for specific sites. Each of the City's thirteen neighborhoods has distinctive needs and resources that can be identified and addressed through neighborhood studies and the City's planning policies. The Growth Policy Document and neighborhood studies complement each other by informing the community of important issues, recommending a plan of action to address the concerns, and utilizing current policies to implement change.

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# *Methodology*

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The Agassiz Neighborhood Study Committee produced its recommendations through an extended process of issue identification, data collection and analysis, and further review and discussion. Community Development Department staff supported this process by gathering and presenting data from a number of sources, chief among them the U. S. Census, the Cambridge Assessing Department, the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance, and the City's Geographic Information System mapping database.

## ***US Census: 1980 and 1990***

The U. S. Census Bureau conducts a survey of every resident in the United States every ten years as mandated by the Federal Constitution. The Census collects demographic information on age distribution, household composition, racial makeup, income, length of residency, employment, and other socioeconomic categories. The decennial Census provides us with the most complete profile of the City and its residents.

During the period that the Study Committee met, 2000 Census data was not yet available. However, this recent Census data has begun to become available as this report went into production. Wherever possible, the most updated Census data is included here.

## ***Cambridge Assessor's Data***

The Study Committee used data from the Assessing Department to analyze the nature and quality of the neighborhood's housing stock, understand the market for renting or buying

housing in Agassiz, and examine the remaining build-out potential in the neighborhood. Housing data examined includes the number of buildings, the number of dwelling units, and the number of housing sales in each property class (1, 2, or 3 family, etc), as well as their sales prices. This analysis forms the basis for evaluating housing availability and affordability in the neighborhood. Property data such as building and lot size, were gathered for all commercially zoned areas and higher density residential zoning districts, and the information used to calculate the amount of additional building allowable in the neighborhood under current zoning.

## ***The Cambridge Zoning Ordinance***

The Zoning Ordinance, in conjunction with Assessing data, was used to determine the remaining build-out potential in Agassiz. The Zoning Ordinance is the part of the municipal code that governs how land and buildings in the City may be used. For each zoning district, the ordinance lays out three types of general regulations:

- 1) Use: what activities or mix of activities may or may not take place;
- 2) Dimensional requirements: what floor-area-ratio, density, height, or setback restrictions apply to any one building in and given zoning district; and,
- 3) Parking requirements: how many spaces, if any, must be included with a building.

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***Geographic Information System Maps***

The Cambridge Management Information Systems Department, working closely with the Community Development Department, has

created an information base of geographic data.

This data can be used to create maps with many levels of data. These maps can be used to conduct planning analysis.

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## *Neighborhood Overview*

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### **HISTORY**

Before European settlement, the core of Agassiz was an area named Pine Swamp, located between Oxford and Kirkland Streets. The infill of this historically low-lying area with residential and institutional development has continued to impact present-day Agassiz residents, resulting in basement flooding and delaying construction of the Red Line subway extension for almost a year due to the need to pump water from the tunnel as it was dug.

Harvard College was the center of life in Cambridge at the beginning of European settlement there. During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, most settlement in what is now Agassiz was on Massachusetts Avenue, a pre-existing Native American path. This development took the form of houses facing the avenue with farms in the back. Massachusetts Avenue was laid out 33 yards wide all the way to Arlington (which was then part of Cambridge), because space was needed to circumnavigate bogs, boulders, and depressions in the roadway.

In 1660, Massachusetts Avenue became the way to connect with the only land route to Boston. The route was north and west of a bridge built at the foot of present-day JFK Street, making Porter Square a strategic location. This bridge was supplemented in 1793 by the construction of the West Boston (now Longfellow) Bridge, and in 1809 by a bridge in East Cambridge where the Charles River Dam is today. Following the development of the railroads, Massachusetts Avenue became one of the most prestigious suburban streets in the Boston area, lined with

large, single-family houses. Due to deed restrictions, no stores or apartment houses were permitted on Massachusetts Avenue until 1911. However, by the 1930s, Massachusetts Avenue had become the mixed-use street it is today.

Development gradually moved from Massachusetts Avenue to what are now the surrounding neighborhoods. Within Agassiz, Harvard College played an important role in leading to settlement, as professors were given opportunities for loans to build housing along Kirkland and lower Oxford Streets. The College itself continued to expand, and was joined in 1909 by Lesley College.

In 1960, the neighborhood was zoned to residence C-3. In the post-war period, the University purchased all the houses around Sacramento Field, and most of the houses on Garfield Street, the south side of Sacramento Street and a number of houses between Sacramento and Everett Street. Development discussions in the late 1960's/early 70's resulted in the publication of the Harvard plan in 1974/5. Gradually, in the 1980's, Harvard began selling the houses it had accumulated; some multi-family buildings became affordable housing.

Apartment house construction in the neighborhood continued throughout the 1950's and in the 1960's and 70's townhouses were built. The City implemented a townhouse ordinance, which encouraged construction that was meant to replace the Arlington pillbox style of apartment house that filled the zoning envelope of a site. The ordinance has been revised several times to produce more attractive townhouses.

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### ***Neighborhood Name***

The neighborhood was originally named for the neighborhood school, which was named for Professor Louis Agassiz, a Swiss-American naturalist who first lived on Oxford Street. Agassiz came to Cambridge to assume the professorship of natural history in the Lawrence Scientific School of Harvard University. He was instrumental in helping Harvard grow from a small college that trained clergymen to a full-fledged university. In 1860, Agassiz founded the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard. He and his wife established a private school for girls (called the Agassiz School) in their home on Quincy Street in 1855, which closed during the Civil War. In 1882, Mrs. Agassiz was involved in the establishment of the Society for the Collegiate Instruction of Women, which later became Radcliffe College.

On May 21, 2002 the Cambridge School Committee voted unanimously to accept the recommendation to change the name of the Agassiz School to the Maria L. Baldwin School. Maria L. Baldwin, an African-American Cantabrigian, served as principal and later master of the school from 1889 until her death in 1922. Under Baldwin's leadership, the school's student body grew until in 1915, the decision was made, with Baldwin's prompting, to build a new school. The present school, which incorporates some elements of Baldwin's school of 1916, was completed in 1995.

While the elementary school has changed its name, at present the title of Agassiz Neighborhood has remained in use by other community organizations.

### ***Agassiz Today: A Demographic Profile***

The City uses a variety of sources to obtain and evaluate information about demographics on the citywide and neighborhood level. Several of the most important include the decennial U.S. Census, the Assessing Department's database, and Massachusetts Division of Employment and Training's employment and wages statistics. In order to fill in gaps in this information, projections derived from statistical models employed by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) and the Massachusetts Institute of Social and Economic Research (MISER) supplement these sources. In addition, each year the City receives a Town-Gown Report from each of the major educational institutions within the city, which includes statistics about the institution's activities during the previous school year.

At the beginning of the Agassiz Study process, the results of the 2000 U.S. Census had not yet been released. By publication, citywide information was available as well as limited neighborhood-level information. The table below provides some recent Census information for Agassiz and the City.

### ***Population***

	<b><i>Agassiz Neighborhood</i></b>			<b><i>City of Cambridge</i></b>		
	<b><i>1990</i></b>	<b><i>2000</i></b>	<b><i>(%) Change</i></b>	<b><i>1990</i></b>	<b><i>2000</i></b>	<b><i>(%) Change</i></b>
<b><i>Total Population</i></b>	5,100	5,241	3%	95,802	101,355	6%
<b><i>Age (years)</i></b>						
0 - 4	141	120	-15%	4,644	4,125	-11%
5 - 17	258	277	7%	7,075	9,322	32%
18 - 24	1,453	1,527	5%	18,778	21,472	14%
25 - 29	1,021	1,106	8%	13,129	14,721	12%
30 - 34	538	568	6%	10,918	10,481	-4%
35 - 44	780	552	-29%	15,325	13,942	-9%
45 - 64	636	873	37%	14,158	18,010	27%
65 and over	273	218	-20%	9,941	9,282	-7%
<b><i>Persons per Acre</i></b>	27	28	4%	23	24	4%
<b><i>Group Quarters Population</i></b>	1,684	1,572	-7%	14,033	14,663	4%

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### **Total Households**

	<b>Agassiz Neighborhood</b>			<b>City of Cambridge</b>		
	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>(%) Change</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>(%) Change</b>
<b>Total Households</b>	1,891	1,980	5%	39,337	42,615	8%
Family Households	651	676	4%	17,648	17,595	<1%
Non-Family Households	1,240	1,304	5%	21,689	25,020	15%
<b>Persons per Household</b>	1.81	1.85	2%	2.08	2.03	-2%

### **Family Households**

	<b>Agassiz Neighborhood</b>			<b>City of Cambridge</b>		
	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>(%) Change</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>(%) Change</b>
<b>Family Households</b>	651	676	4%	17,648	17,595	<1%
w/ Own Children under 18 Yrs.	262	258	-2%	7,617	7,503	-1%
Married Couple Families	538	535	-1%	12,685	12,408	-2%
w/ Own Children under 18 Yrs.	223	185	-17%	5,139	4,835	-6%
Unmarried Householder	113	141	25%	4,963	5,187	5%
w/ Own Children under 18 Yrs.	39	73	87%	2,478	2,668	8%

### **Housing Units**

	<b>Agassiz Neighborhood</b>			<b>City of Cambridge</b>		
	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>(%) Change</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>(%) Change</b>
<b>Housing Units</b>	1,988	2,060	4%	41,979	44,725	7%
Owner-occupied	513	597	16%	11,959	13,760	15%
Renter-occupied	1,390	1,383	-1%	27,446	28,855	5%
Vacant	85	80	-6%	2,574	2,110	-18%
<b>Housing Units per Acre</b>	10.2	10.6	4%	10.2	10.9	7%

*Source: 1990 and 2000 U.S. Decennial Census*

### **Population**

Between 1990 and 2000, the population of Cambridge increased from 95,802 to 101,355 residents. Only a small fraction of that growth occurred in Agassiz, which saw its population increase from 5,100 to 5,241 persons. Roughly 5% of the city's population lives within the Agassiz neighborhood. Compared to the other thirteen neighborhoods within the city, Agassiz is smaller than many in terms of both land area and population. A significant portion of land in the neighborhood is devoted to institutional uses.

Within Agassiz, the number of persons per household declined between 1980 and 1990 from 1.91 to 1.81, but increased to 1.85 by 2000. While Cambridge tends to have smaller household sizes than the US average, it should be noted that Agassiz has a small average household size compared to other neighborhoods within the city

(citywide, the average number of person per household was 2.03 in 2000). However, within the residential portions of Agassiz, the population is fairly dense.

### **Educational Achievement**

The demographics of the neighborhood reflect the physical presence of educational institutions within the neighborhood, most notably in the high level of education among the population and the industry in which they are employed. In 1990, only Area 2 (mostly MIT) reported comparable levels of higher education. At that time, the typical resident of Agassiz over the age of 25 was much more likely to have a college degree than other residents of Cambridge or the United States. At the same time, far fewer residents were found at lower levels of education; for example, only 2.4% of Agassiz residents had less than a high

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school diploma or GED, compared with 15.6% of Cambridge residents. More detailed information about education levels in the Agassiz neighborhood appears in the economic development section of this study, which begins on page 37.

#### ***Population Density***

Density within the Agassiz neighborhood is comparable to that of the city as a whole, at 10.6 versus 10.9 housing units per acre. Overall, Cambridge is the 10<sup>th</sup> densest city with a population of 50,000 or more in the country. While there are some high-rise buildings within the city, the housing stock generally consists of 2, 3, and 4-story buildings, both single and multi-family.

#### ***Diversity***

According to the 2000 Census, Agassiz is roughly 80% White, a figure largely unchanged since the 1990 Census. Five percent of residents are Black, 11% are Asian/ Pacific Islander, and 3% are Two or More Races. Native Americans and Other Races compose a very small percentage of the population. Cambridge as a whole is 68% White, 12% Black, 12% Asian/ Pacific Islander, and 5% Two or More Races. In 2000, approximately 6% of the Agassiz population indicated that they were of Hispanic origin. This is fairly similar to the city as a whole.

#### ***Housing Tenure***

While Cambridge has had, and continues to have, a large renter population, there has been an

increase in homeownership in recent years. Agassiz's location near the retail, educational, employment, and transportation amenities of Harvard Square continues to make it a popular location for renters. In 2000, out of 2,060 total housing units, 597 were Owner-Occupied and 1,383 were Renter-Occupied.

#### ***Age Distribution***

Compared to the rest of Cambridge, Agassiz has relatively few children. However, its proximity to Harvard and Lesley Universities increase its population of those of traditional college age, thus decreasing overall median age. In 1990, the median age among Agassiz residents was 28.4 years, versus 31.1 years for the city at large.

#### ***Place of Residence Five Years Earlier***

According to the 1990 Census, about two-thirds of the population had moved to the neighborhood within the last five years. However, considering that approximately one-third of residents at any given time live in dormitories, and that there are others within the neighborhood who are students, the neighborhood does have a stable, long-term population of approximately 30%.

#### ***Income***

In real terms, residents of Cambridge and Agassiz increased their income between 1979 and 1989. Agassiz is very near the top of Cambridge neighborhoods in terms of household and family income.



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# ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



*Baldwin School, 28 Sacramento Street*

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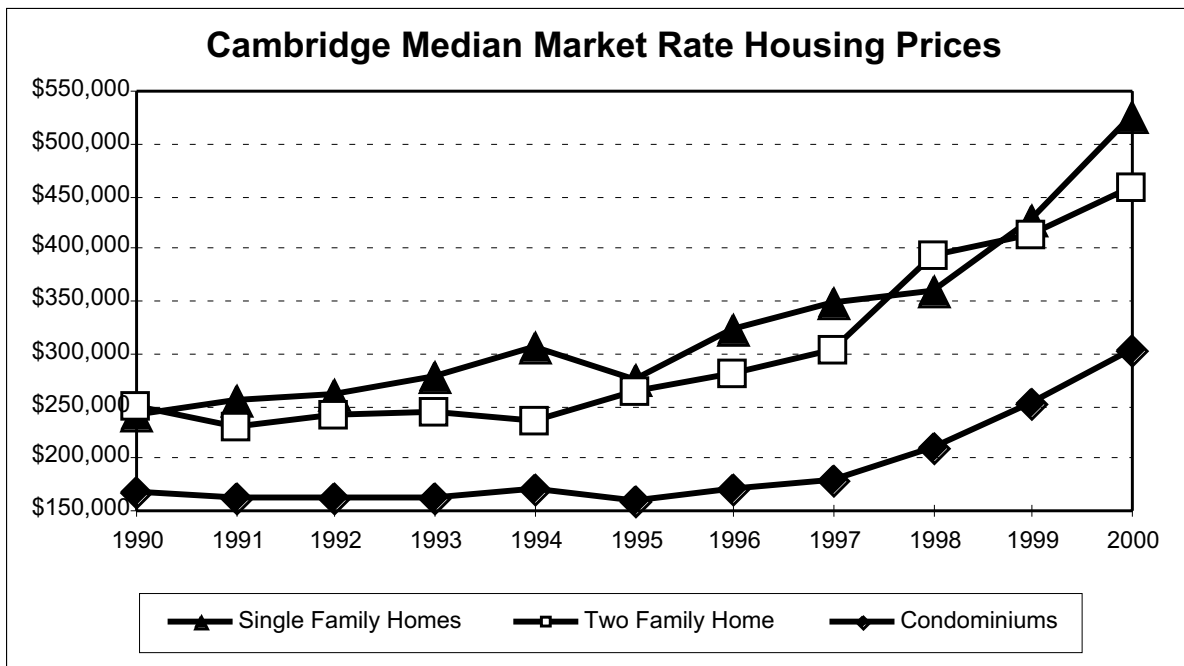
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# Housing

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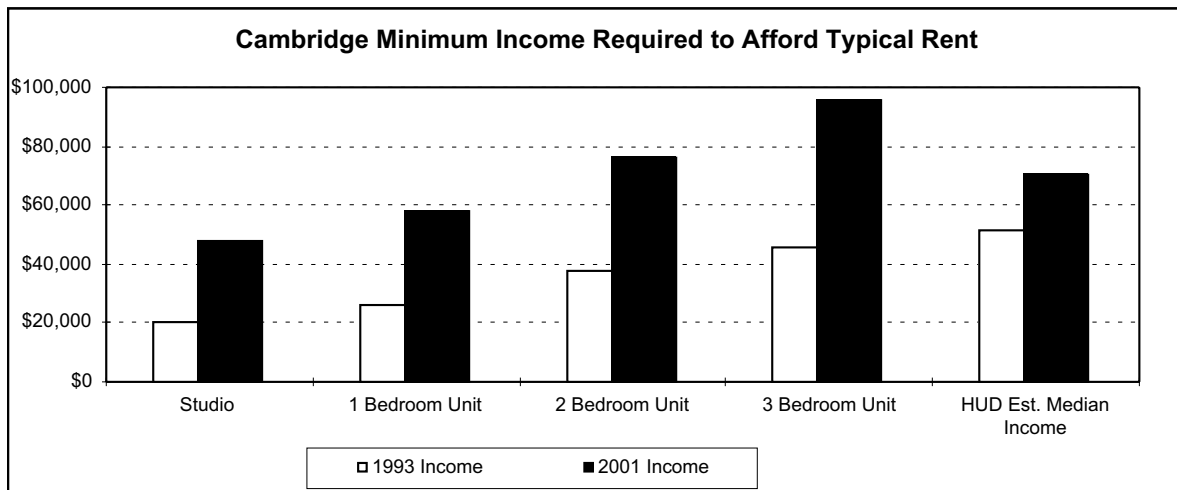
Over the last couple of decades, the availability and affordability of housing has become an extraordinarily important issue for Cambridge residents. Housing prices in the city have risen dramatically in recent years for a variety of reasons, including the end of rent control in 1994. The increased demand for housing in recent years resulted in higher prices to rent or purchase a

residence in Cambridge. Although new industries in the city have attracted a significant number of higher skilled workers that are able to afford higher housing costs, the cost of housing has, for the most part, outpaced the income of many long time residents resulting in a desire for more affordable units.

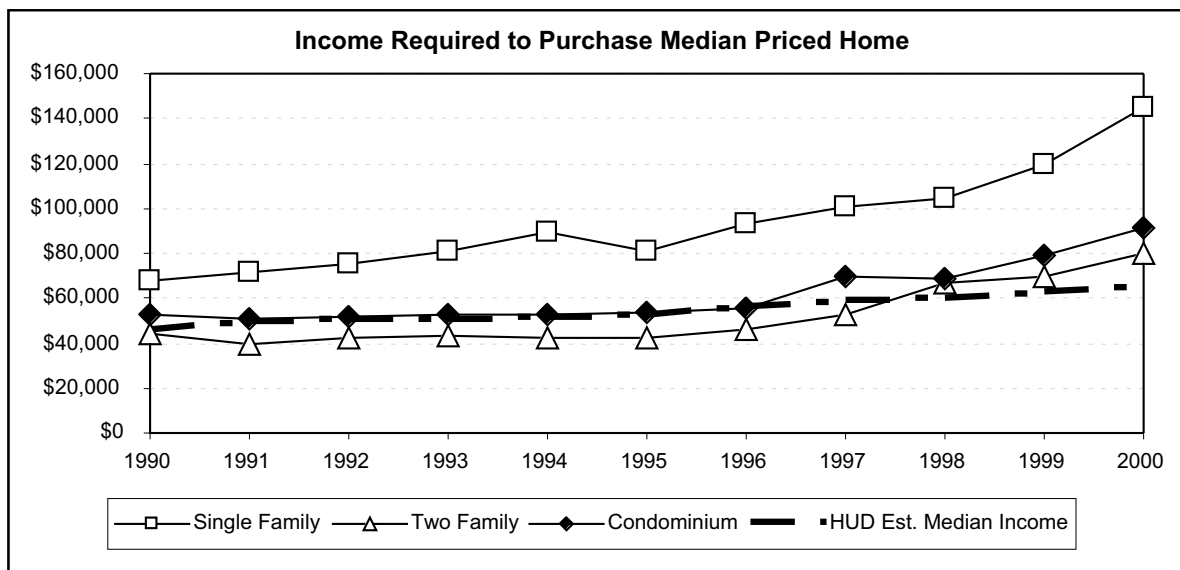


*N.B.: Note that all cost figures are unadjusted for inflation*

*Sources: Cambridge Revaluation Office, 2001; Cambridge Community Development Dept., 2001.*



Minimum incomes based on payment of 30% of pre-tax income for housing expenses. In the table above HUD estimated median income indicates level of rent affordable to a family of four with median income. Sources: Cambridge Community Development Department, 2001; HUD, 2001.



Minimum incomes based on payment of 30% of pre-tax income for housing expenses. In the table above HUD estimated median income indicates mortgage affordable to a family of four with median income. Sources: Cambridge Community Development Department, 2001; HUD, 2001.

The City of Cambridge seeks to preserve the existing housing stock and explore new opportunities to provide housing for residents at all socioeconomic levels. There are a number of affordable housing programs that currently exist in the city. Cambridge has an Affordable Housing Trust, which is a City Manager appointed board that grants deferred loans, makes funding decisions, and helps guide the City's housing policy. In 1998, the City adopted an inclusionary zoning

ordinance, which sets aside 15% of units as affordable in new residential developments of 10 or more housing units. There are also a number of nonprofit housing developers active in the city including: Homeowners Rehab. Inc. (HRI); Just A Start Corporation (JAS); Cambridge Neighborhood Housing Apartment Services (CNAHS); and CASCAP. The City also offers a First Time Homebuyer Class and provides home-buying counseling services.

The Agassiz neighborhood has some of the most expensive housing in the city. The median sale prices for different housing types within the neighborhood in 2000 are listed below.

**Median Housing Sale Prices  
in the Agassiz Neighborhood, 2000**

	<i>Number of Sales</i>	<i>Median Price</i>
Single Family	5	\$675,000
Two Family	3	\$972,000
Three Family	1	\$1,735,000
1-3 Family	9	\$972,000
Condominium	17	\$331,000

*Source: Cambridge Revaluation Office, 2001; Cambridge Community Development Department, 2001.*

Currently, due to a very limited amount of available land, there do not appear to be many immediate prospects for new affordable housing in the neighborhood. However, opportunities may

arise in the future as parcels are sold or redeveloped. Funds, such as those available through the Community Preservation Act may be helpful in capitalizing on any future opportunities.

The housing stock in the Agassiz neighborhood did not change much between 1980 and 2000, although there have been a significant number of conversions of rental units into condominiums in the neighborhood. Between 1970 and 2000 there were 298 units and 59 buildings converted into condominium use. Corresponding to these conversions, the number of owner occupied units increased between 1980 and 2000. The Agassiz neighborhood lost a considerable portion of the renter occupied units in comparison to those lost throughout the entire city. The number of renter occupied units in Agassiz decreased by 11.6% between 1980 and 2000 compared to a decrease of 3.6% for the City of Cambridge during the same time period.

**Tenure of Housing Units 1980 - 2000**

	<i>1980</i>	<i>1990</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>Change 1980-2000 (Net)</i>	<i>Change 1980-2000 (%)</i>
<b>City of Cambridge</b>	41,300	41,979	44,725	3,425	8.3%
Owner-Occupied	8,889	11,959	13,760	4,871	54.8%
Renter-Occupied	29,947	27,446	28,855	(1,092)	-3.6%
Vacant	2,464	2,574	2,110	(354)	-14.4%
<b>Agassiz/Area 8</b>	2,021	1,988	2,060	39	1.9%
Owner-Occupied	373	513	597	224	60.1%
Renter-Occupied	1,565	1,390	1,383	(182)	-11.6%
Vacant	83	85	80	(3)	-3.6%

*Source: U. S. Decennial Census; 1980 Cambridge, Mass. Neighborhood Statistics; 1990 User Defined Areas Program analysis of Cambridge, Massachusetts Neighborhoods; 2000 SF1 Data File analyzed by Cambridge Community Development Department.*

There were 1,988 housing units in Agassiz in 1990; this number increased to 2,060 in 2000. Over half of the households in Agassiz consisted of a single person in 1990, compared to 42% citywide. With 1.85 persons per household in 2000, the Agassiz neighborhood has fewer persons per household than any other neighborhood in the city. The significant number of households with only one or a few persons residing in them is most

likely due to the educational institutions present in the neighborhood and their associated dormitories. In 2000, there were 1,572 Agassiz residents, or 30% of the neighborhood population, that lived in group quarters (mostly in dormitories). Only two other neighborhoods MIT (neighborhood 2), and Riverside (neighborhood 7), had a higher percentage of residents living in group quarters.

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## *Housing Recommendations*

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1. In order to maintain a diverse community, the City of Cambridge should explore affordable housing opportunities in the Agassiz neighborhood as they may arise.
  2. The City should explore the possibility of allowing single room occupancy buildings in more residential districts and acquiring land or structures for this use.
  3. The Committee recognizes that, by developing dormitories, institutions help to reduce pressure on other renters in the neighborhood. However, any new student housing construction in the Agassiz neighborhood should be low density and in keeping with the existing scale and character of the neighborhood.
  4. The City of Cambridge should pursue the affordable housing funds available through the Community Preservation Act.